

Old school gets new life

Construction's underway inside town's new \$6.3 million library

By Grey Perry
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DUXBURY — It is impossible to describe the new Alden Library project without using superlatives.

At \$6.3 million, it's one of the largest projects ever undertaken by the people of Duxbury, according to Debbie Bornheimer, project manager. It received the largest award of \$2.127 million — after the Boston Public Library — under the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners grant for public library construction in 1994. It received the largest grant made that same year of \$200,000 under Title 2 of the federal Library Services Construction Act, and was designated as its distinguished project that year, just before that program dried up. The vote for funding attracted the most

people, (in the 13 years since Nancy Oates has been town clerk) almost 900, for town meeting to approve \$3 million as the town's share of the project. And the project is now approaching \$1 million in private donations, a figure that could go much higher as library construction proceeds.

Alden Library has become a project that has brought widespread community involvement as few other projects ever have.

"The effort has been a tremendous community experience, bonding diverse groups together to build the consensus necessary to launch a building which will go beyond being a conventional library to become a true community center," Bornheimer said. Donations, similarly, range across a spectrum of the largest gifts from generous benefactors to the pennies being collected by school children. Everyone who wants to help has been able to in some way.

First library in 1889

Following a trend established by affluent people who felt strongly about education, Duxbury's first library was established by a \$5,000 gift from resident Henry Winsor in

1889. (Andrew Carnegie founded 1,700 libraries throughout the country at about the same time, with the thought that they were necessary to help educate immigrants, like himself.) The library remained private until the 1960s, when in order to qualify for certain state and federal funds, it, like most libraries in the state, became public and was turned over to the town. The oldest section of the library was built in 1909. An addition was built in 1968, when it took its present shape and size of 12,700 square feet.

The Alden School was built in 1926, originally as the high school. It was used as an elementary school after the high school was built, and in 1992 was mothballed when school enrollment temporarily went down. Before changes to that building are reviewed, it is necessary to go back to 1988, when Bornheimer was a library trustee.

More than anyone else, the Alden Library project is associated with Bornheimer. In 1988, she chose not to run again as library trustee and was named to be chairman of the long range planning committee.

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mittee for the library. From 1990 to 1993, she was chairman of the design development committee with responsibility to recommend what the new library should look like and how it should function. In 1995, town manager Rocco Longo appointed her project manager for the new library. She is past president of the private library trustees, a lawyer, has consulted with real estate developers, and by her own admission, is obsessed with the project.

"It's definitely not a one person show," said Bornheimer. "There has been more community involvement in this project than can be imagined. The private and public trustees of the library, the Friends of the Library, and many interested parties have taken the time to listen to each other and to listen to the community. A consensus was built to develop the strategy necessary to make this project happen. The various groups have bonded; we have become invincible."

"We are bringing the library into the 21st century," she said.

Bornheimer gains enthusiasm when she begins to describe the eventual finished product. "The Alden building is three stories, and will have two entrances at upper and lower grades. The main floor of the library will be accessed from the campus direction, or by elevator from the lower level, which will be accessed from the 90 car parking lot adjoining the existing tennis courts." Those courts and the existing playground will not be affected by any construction.

The library will reflect community needs for all ages. The children's library will be four times

larger than the present one. There will be a young adults area, with a homework center which will be suitable for small group instruction. Also, a teen call-home area, study carrels, reading rooms for adults, 35 computers, internet access, a meeting room for 120 people plus another meeting room accommodating 15-30 people are included. There will be two art galleries, a local history room, a room devoted to Friends of the Library, a kitchen, perhaps an ATM and even a cafe.

Bornheimer envisions certain functions such as a copy and fax center, offering some business services not currently available in town. Of course, there will be full facilities for all library administrative and technical functions.

The new library has received many generous donations, and many rooms and areas have already been endowed. The campaign committee is always looking for more donors and more naming opportunities still exist.

"We want as many names on the Millennium bronze plaque as we can get," Bornheimer said. "We are safely approaching \$1 million in donations, and if we could get \$2 million, we would have an endowment which would be so important for our future."

A design firm has been engaged to begin work on interior design. (Related story, A15) In addition, the Bumpus and Community Art Galleries are in the process of commissioning work to set up art shows to coincide with the opening of the library. Renovation construction is expected to take a year, with completion due in late fall of '97.

Editor's note: next week, a look at some other key people working behind the scenes on this project.



Staff photo/Grey Perry

Gutted — The Alden Building will be a mere shell of its former self before construction begins on a new interior.